



Maricopa County Animal Care & Control

Introducing A New Dog to Children

Kids and dogs are not automatically going to start off with a wonderful relationship. They are two different species, and neither really understands the behavior and the needs of the other. Active participation from adults will be necessary in order to teach the dog and the children acceptable behavior and to set limits on both. This guide is about introductions and it pertains to a dog's initial meeting with children in the family, their friends, or other children encountered on walks or elsewhere. Even if the dog does well with children in the family, you should not assume it will be fine with all other children. As their relationship develops, other problems may occur between kids and dogs, such as play patterns, mouthing and nipping.

The general goals in introducing dogs to children are similar to those encountered in introducing dogs to other dogs - preventing fearful or aggressive responses, teaching the dog to associate good things with the child's presence, and keeping both the dog and the child from getting out of control.

Eliciting and reinforcing appropriate behavior

- The child should be standing still, or preferably, sitting when the dog is first

introduced.

- The dog will usually feel more at ease if he is allowed to approach the child rather than vice versa.
- The child should toss tidbits on the ground as the dog approaches, starting when the dog is 3 to 4 feet away.
- The child should avoid body postures that the dog might perceive as threatening. These should include eye contact, reaching toward the dog, leaning over him, hugging or kissing him, or approaching him front to front.
- After the dog is at ease (showing no fearful, threatening, or aggressive behavior) when picking up treats from the ground at the child's feet, have the child hold his/her hand at the side with a tidbit in the fist. This may require that he/she squat down or sit on a chair. The child should not move his/her hand toward the dog.
- As the dog sniffs the child's hand, he/she should slowly open the fist, allowing the dog to take the tidbit from the open palm. Repeat several times.
- If the dog is comfortable taking the treat, the child can then gently scratch him under the chin with his/her fingers.
- The child can then ask the dog to

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obey a command that the dog responds to reliably in return for the tidbit.

- More interaction can gradually be allowed, such as looking at the dog more directly and petting or stroking him, if the dog is doing well.
- Alternatively, if the dog knows how to fetch (returning the toy and relinquishing it without a struggle), the child can throw a toy for the dog.

Preventing or minimizing inappropriate behavior ("mistakes")

- Do not allow children to rush up to a dog they haven't met before.
- Do not allow quick movements, loud talking or screaming, hugging, or reaching toward the dog during the initial interactions.
- If the dog is fearful, do not tighten up on his leash or require him to sit-stay. This may make a fearful dog snap as the child approaches because he cannot back away.
- Allow the dog to avoid the interaction if he is not comfortable with it. Do not force a fearful or anxious dog to accept petting.
- If the dog is boisterous and jumping up rather than fearful, require him from the beginning to sit as he receives the treat.
- For boisterous dogs, use a head halter.

- Dogs and children must be supervised every minute during the introductory period to prevent problems that could endanger one or both of them.

Minimizing the use of punishment & using punishment correctly when necessary

- The child should move away when the jumping occurs and approach when the dog is sitting or standing quietly.
- Punishment is never indicated for fearful responses, including fear-motivated aggression.
- If the dog consistently shows fear or aggressive behavior when meeting children, problem resolution techniques are necessary.

Providing for the dog's behavioral needs or meeting the puppy's developmental needs

- Puppies should be socialized to children, beginning during the sensitive socialization period.
- Dogs need to be protected from mistreatment by children. That the child "doesn't know any better" is not an excuse; the child needs to be taught appropriate behavior.